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NO REVELATIONS

by

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ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Untitled. Oil on canvas. 72x54.
2. Untitled. Oil on canvas. 48x48.
3. Smoke Grey. Stone lithograph. 28x44.
4. Untitled. Stone lithograph. 24x30.
5. Fighting is Fun. Oil on canvas. 48x48.
6. Car Jamming. Stone lithograph. 30x44.

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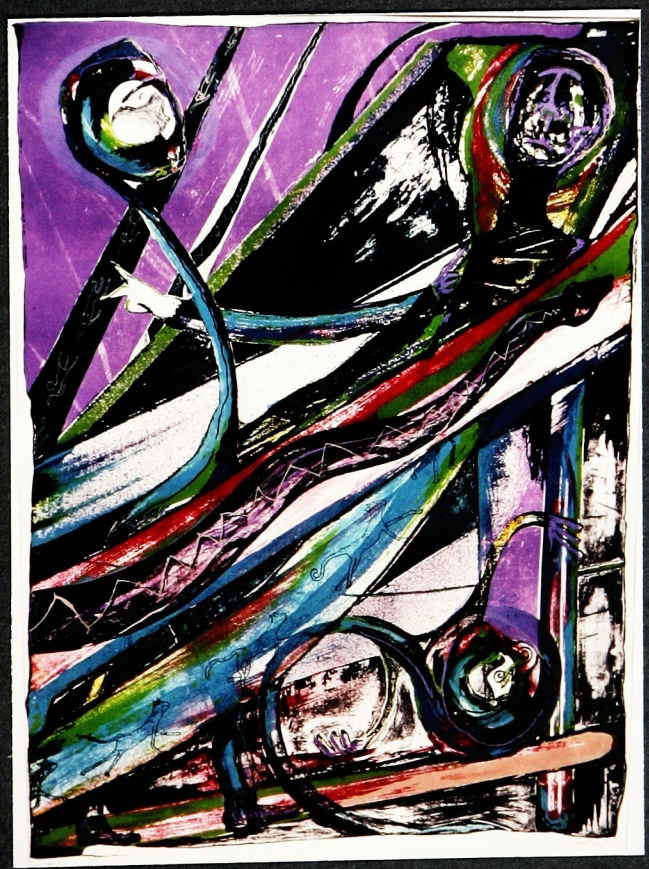

I have decided that it is best to accept one's natural talents for what they are, and to use them not to uncover the forces of life but to add stark images to an already unavoidable and fundamental existence. An artist can spend a lifetime questioning his or her motivations, seeking answers to questions of life and truth that can only remain elusive. It is that inherent human curiousity that makes one question their reason for being as well as their purpose while on earth. For the artist, such philosophical lines of thought often become the backbone of their body of work, and a powerful channel for their creative endeavors. Henri Matisse made the following comments in a letter written in 1938, and I tend to relate more closely to these views regarding the source of his inspiration:

> There are many things I would like to understand, and most of all myself--after a half a century of hard work and reflection the wall is still there. Nature--or rather, my nature--remains mysterious. Meanwhile I believe I have put a little order in my chaos by keeping alive the tiny light that guides me and still energetically answers the frequent enough SOS. I am not intelligent (Cowart and Fourcade 1986, 124).

These comments epitomize the results of my search for the essence of my own body of work. Rather than expending energies in meandering philosophical thought patterns, I rely on a more instinctive and gut-level approach.

However I cannot completely deny the presence of these enigmatic sides of life. As I attempt to keep such influences from entering my work, I find that my subconscious mind is

always creeping up and showing itself in the artwork I generate. The images I arrive at end up pervaded with the same undercurrents of mystery that serve to create them. The questions I pretend not to acknowledge are both asked and answered within an image, although such references are not always obvious to me on a conscious level.

There lies the heart of my work, in the paradox of levels of consciousness. While I am often baffled by my abilities as an artist, I do try to retain a grasp on that tiny light that Matisse speaks of, and try to have some means of explaining it. Here that light is referred to as a "seed" in this discussion of jazz improvisation:

> The creative process occurs at all levels of consciousness, ranging from minimal to total awareness. This, in turn, is possible because "inspiration" occurs precisely at the moment when the most complete mental and psychological preparation for a given task has been achieved. Inspiration is like a seed which cannot come forth until the ground has been prepared and a certain formative period has elapsed (Coker 1964, ix).

This reference is, in effect, describing the unknown variables involved in the process of creation, and what I believe is an often uncontrollable and uncertain synthesis of these variables that results in art work.

If I had to simplify my motivations in order to explain them quickly, I would be satisfied in saying that I am an artist because I have a vivid imagination and I like to smear blobs of grease on a slab of limestone or blobs of color on a canvas. Seeing that this instance calls for a more in-depth

explanation, I will provide what glimpses I can of that tiny light, and of the fuel that keeps it burning.

What I have chosen to study in the accompanying body of work are elements of containment and imprisonment that I see hidden within our society beneath a framework of freedom. I have transferred ambiguous signals received during a lifetime into a formula for creating a satisfying image. The primary source of these observations has been the city neighborhoods that I have both visited and lived in throughout my life. I watch people and react to their placement within their urban habitat, then I formulate artistic ideas from how I feel they react to the constraints of the surrounding buildings. These ideas then make the gradual transition to a two-dimensional format.

These images are not a direct attempt on my part to comment on our urban difficulties. I use what I see only as a springboard to work from as the artist. As I struggle with the painted image, fighting my way from the blank canvas to the slow progress amongst the growing spaces and structures that appear, so does the man off the street meet with his own daily struggle standing amongst the buildings where he himself resides. This examination of life in the city is the foundation of my work. It is the influence for the spacial relationships as well as the basis of the curiousity and fear that I paint into these pictures.

The fracturing of space is one of the most obvious vis-

ual elements in these images. Although the picture plane is extensively divided, the positive and negative spaces still retain a sense of strong structure. The power of the images is firmly rooted in the organization of this structure. I could not finish a painting without feeling the strength of those great surfaces locking together in completion. I am thereby trapped with a work in progress. Until the right space comes forward and its proper partner falls behind it, I am committed to a piece. Working out the proper order of an image is in the end the release, the reward.

The use of this fractured space is part of my attempt to describe what I perceive is a blurred line between freedom and imprisonment. I use the term "blurred line" to refer to the often ambiguous impressions I get from my observations of humanity. There is an underlying loss of human freedom that is apparent to me in these ambiguous signals. To further define this so-called loss of freedom, its integral components are desire, insanity, poverty, moroseness, jealousy, deafness, greed, joy in confusion or chaos, despair, or the trap of an irrational sense of purpose brought on by any number of the above items. To further confuse matters, each of these components, as well as others, can be judged as either a cause or an effect of the loss of freedom.

To represent the loss or lack of freedom, I use the bars, walls and angular divisions of the images. The space that appears as a passageway may in fact be the entrance to an area

of confinement. Although nothing within these works has the appearance of an obvious cage, the spaces represent the subtle human cages we create for ourselves and for one another. In this manner, I have thrown the task of emoting a scene on the structures that inhabit the pictures. Instead of describing emotions on the faces of the figures, the loss of freedom is portrayed through the use of urban-based walls and openings.

As the structural composition became the main focus of my work, the figurative elements were assigned a supporting role. By describing the figures with the same broad structural strokes as their surroundings, I have again introduced an ambiguous element to the artwork. The bars and walls that are used to represent the environment in the pictures are the same bars and walls that are used to constitute the figures. This approach serves to suggest the confusion and uncertainty that exists for the beings that are painted into these images. As the interior/exterior spaces take on the bulk of the duty in affecting a scene, the figures fulfill their lesser role by reflecting what they can of that scene.

The blending of the figures with the structures that surround them is the method I have chosen to communicate my thoughts and sensations. I have reduced the presence of the figures to the most basic of marks. They are stick figures drawn with thick bars, lacking personality other than their posture, which is only an offshoot of their surroundings. In

this fashion, I have blurred the distinction between freedom and imprisonment. The figures are the unseen bars that they are surrounded by, and yet they remain unaware of the situation. These circumstances further the plight of these unknowing beings, existing in such a strange situation, yet one so taken for granted.

The simplified figures have had their thoughts transferred to their surroundings. This is part of the method I have arrived at to describe what I feel I am seeing. I am both confused and delighted by what I witness going on in our society, and I attempt to sort out these emotions in my work. This situational curiousity is the starting point, and from there I gradually work out my ideas with brush and paint. My results end up reflecting not only the human plight on the streets, but my own strange plight as the ever-wondering artist.

The use of broad strokes is a technique that developed from my slowly escalating dissatisfaction and impatience with small, meticulously rendered work. As my thoughts and ideas took their direction, I found that my technique developed in a parallel direction. The bold and physical technique I was beginning to employ lent itself perfectly to the strengths and weaknesses I depict in my work.

My first two years of printmaking were spent almost exclusively in the media of etching or intaglio. Around the time of my introduction to lithography, I was realizing not only

my dissatisfaction with the resultant imagery, but also my physical frustration with the technical processes involved in acid etching. This initiation to lithography also coincided with my budding interest in painting. While intaglio is often a slow and laborious process, lithography enjoyed more of the freedoms I associated with painting. Intaglio seemed to be a more withdrawn process; one which involved remaining hunched over a small zinc plate in the exacting procedure of scratching fine lines, etching them, and then later scraping them away if changes were necessary. By the virtues of both my impatience and physical size, I became drawn to a method of expressing myself artistically in a more spontaneous and substantial fashion. My whole body became involved in these creations, particularly at the outset of a piece. Great physical energy was needed to overcome the wall that is faced when starting out with a blank canvas or limestone. Here is another representation of a barrier that is involved with the creation of these pictures, in this case, an often-faced wall--a primed surface waiting to be drawn upon.

My choice of spontaneous working method is one in which there is little or no pre-planning in regards to the image. I bravely face these surfaces without premeditating, and wait for the jolt of energy that starts my arms in motion. From then on it becomes a conversation between myself and my materials. Ideas are generated as I face a work in progress and react to each successive mark that is made. The work changes. I

tell the work what to do by taking a stroke at it, and then it reciprocates by showing me what my next stroke should be. In the following extract, Gerald Nordland describes his witnessing of Richard Diebenkorn's working method:

> The artist must begin anew with each painting, feeling out the size of the canvas and the rhythms that seem right to the particular proportions chosen on a particular day. Diebenkorn cannot "design" a painting in his head, but must try out his thoughts, adjusting as necessary. Each decision relates to every successive one and it is necessary at every stage of the painting's development to work with the conviction that this is the final stage and nearing completion. If adjustments and corrections are required, they must be handled consistently. At the next studio session, he may find a weakness and he will enter the work through that weakness and reconceive the whole (Nordland 1987, 145).

These comments describe a working method that is closely akin to my own. They accurately represent the conversation between artist and materials that I referred to earlier; that which consists of painting, reacting to any new changes, and then making progressive adjustments as the visual elements of the work proceed to lock together in harmony. "The process continues as the artist and the picture influence one another in a continuous interchange, though to the observer it may look as if only the picture were developing (Gallwitz 1985, 34)." This interchange is the means by which these pictures are created, in a sense by my reaction to the surroundings I create within the images. The individuals portrayed in the artwork follow a similar path, as they, in a sense, are reacting to their surroundings.

My images gradually became larger as I felt the need

to express myself more physically. As I grew away from intaglio and grew towards enlarging my images through what seemed the more practical media of lithography and painting, I realized the need involved a physical approach to the application of the mark-making materials. To overcome the resistance of these materials, I began using a physical attack upon the receptive surfaces that required a lot of body english to back up the motions that my arm was taking with brush in hand. It became necessary to use a forceful attack on my surfaces in order to successfully overpower the initial block that exists when first facing the start of a new piece, when ideas are in their formative stages. This aggressive method also worked best in situations that would arise further along in the development of an image, when perhaps thing weren't evolving as I felt they should have. In these circumstances, I would use this forceful mark-making technique to make both speedy and drastic changes in an image that was not developing in a satisfactory direction, in fact an image that was cuasing such frustration that the problem could only be resolved through an expediant process of changes.

These techniques, at first only physically relevant, eventually gained importance as the cause of a reappearing set of symbols. The brusqueness of my approach to painting lent itself to a series of simple yet elemental marks that took on the most common form of the thick lines that became the walls and bars of my images.

Strength lies in that most simple of motions, drawing or painting a line. The strength it takes to boldly draw a loaded brush across a surface is immediately transferred into a powerful visual element. By simply drawing one bold stroke across another, the dynamics of a work of art can be instantly created or instantly defeated. Whether it is called an **x** or a cross, the intersection of two lines carries a strong symbolic importance. As I am referring to concepts of freedom versus imprisonment, these bars (be they intersecting or not) are ideal representations, as they fulfill the role I give them of suggesting both freedom and imprisonment. Such a common symbol can be loaded with assorted meanings, but I have seen fit to use these intersecting lines to imply the ambiguity of an area that exists as either an entrance into an enclosure or an entrance into liberation on the other side. These areas are described in such a manner as to leave the outcome of a venture within an unsure proposition.

Another of the broad marks that I began using is in the form of a drawn circle. It carries similar implications in that it can represent an opening or a passageway. It also serves me as a figurative element, portraying the position of the head of a figure. In combination with the broad bars of an image (be they intersecting or not), the drawn circle serves as a portion of the figure taken to the point of extreme simplification. I took this approach of simplifying the figure to its basic elements to cast the task of emoting a

scene on the environment surrounding the figure. At the same time, by so closely blending the figure with its backdrop, I have again cast a shadow of ambiguity on the occurences within a picture. The stick-like rendering of the figures and the similar rendering of the backround tie the images more closely to me in their expressiveness, and help convey the overall feeling of uncertainty that I seek to project into my artwork. The meanings that I have attached to these visual techniques are one part of the synthesis of processes that results in the eventual piece of art.

I have never aligned my views with those of any one specific art movement, choosing instead to allow my subconscious to absorb ideas from a wide variety of sources within the realm of art history. The manner in which I use color can be traced back to a host of places. For instance, the Social Realists "heightened color for emotional impact, exaggerated features, or distorted physical scale in order to achieve emphasis (Time-Life Books 1970, 96)." Earlier in the twentieth century, when the Fauves were making their discoveries, color "was now being used for its own sake, independently of the subject, and light and space were generated by color alone (Leymarie 1987, 17)." Both of these comments state equally my own intentions in the manner in which I use color. If I sought to do so, I would be able to find numerous other references stating ideas similar to my own, in regards to color or otherwise. I consider much of this ab-

sorption as occuring on a subliminal level, yet accounting for most of the freedom I have attained in my execution of work. The freedom comes in knowing the infinite number of paths there are to follow, and that the resources for ideas and thoughts are as unlimited and undefinable as art history itself.

While the description of the influences that I acknowledge as the source or inspiration for these images would suggest that I am commenting on the need for societal reforms, such is not exactly the case. The need for reform will always exist in our society. However, my images are not comments on that need, but are comments on individuals attempting to survive within the constraints of that society.

Over time, I have assimilated ideas from the Social Realists and their output. They studied topics of urban abuse, dehumanization and depression; such topics also come into play in my studies. The urban setting of the Social Realist's work is also a common denominator. However, my own study is of the individual rather than the broader scope, namely the cause of the individual's problems. I am only interested in the individual's reaction to their predicament of life. Ben Shahn, an important artist associated with the Social Realists, was able to turn the ideas of the group in upon himself as is seen in the following comment:

> I prefer to call it personal realism. The distinction is that social realism is dictated from the outside; personal realism comes from your own guts (Time-Life Books 1970, 97).

In the same way that Shahn has done, I choose not to identify too closely with rules set up for an artistic movement of some sort, but to operate just outside the characteristics of a movement, using their influence in order to formulate a more personal approach. Which is not to say that I am not working just outside the characteristics of numerous movements at the same time at any given instance.

My objective is not in painting social problems, and I have no obsession with solutions to such problems. I focus on the links of the problem chain. Those links, when taken singly, lose the context of their broader social aspects. That is when my interest is aroused; when the individual somehow becomes removed from the social context they belong in. This removal can occur on many physical and mental levels, with subtlety, contentment or violence. The study is of human interaction.

Such things as art are learned through the passage of time, and through the accompanying absorption process that goes on day by day. The artist builds a backlog of visions and sensations; everyday experiences which feed "the well of memory which holds countless unsystemized images seen in books, magazines, television, film, museums--the inescapable visual culture that we all share (Geldzahler 1983, 34)." If one thing can be learned from a comprehensive study of art history, it is that freedom has been strived for and often achieved by artists throughout the centuries. The most influential art-

ists have been those that broke new ground; those that were the most adept at shedding the fetters of that which has come before.

Ideas develop out of attempts to do what hasn't been done before. In an endeavor to stretch the limits of what has been seen, one cannot help but to continue pushing, searching; trying to add to the pages of art history rather than repeat them. The most powerful images have been created by those artists that have pushed the limits of the accepted. They have gone beyond the fondness of the masses and still succeeded.

As for concepts of freedom and imprisonment, their definitions are in the eye and mind of the beholder. What I am presenting in this body of work is my current definition. And that definition is subject to change.

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